

Clayton shines at area youth career fair

By Myra Westmoreland

As a research institute, NIEHS focuses on understanding how the environment affects people's health, but it adds to the cause by participating in programs that encourage young people to enter careers in environmental health sciences.

In one of those outreach events, [Natasha Clayton](#), a biologist in the NIEHS Cellular and Molecular Pathology Branch, joined 11 other professionals at the [Clarence E. Lightner YMCA Achievers](http://www.ymcatriangle.org/programs-services/clubs-activities/lightner-y-achievers) (<http://www.ymcatriangle.org/programs-services/clubs-activities/lightner-y-achievers>) Career Fair April 20 in Raleigh, N.C. Sponsored by the YMCA of the Triangle, the event exposed teenagers, from underrepresented groups, to a number of professions available to them once they finish high school.

In addition to hearing from Clayton, approximately 70 middle school and high school students were treated to talks from people in the fields of cosmetology, law, medicine, military service, music, psychology, and education.

Being an example

As a representative of one of the myriad of careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), Clayton discussed how to become a biologist and how to stay on top once there. She presented an overview of NIEHS, her day-to-day work in support of the mission, and information about several training opportunities available at the Institute. Clayton explained why she was compelled to participate in the career fair.

"I feel it is my responsibility to give back, by sharing my experiences with the youth in our communities," Clayton said. "I could see much promise in the teens with whom I interacted, and see many of them as future leaders."

Kendall Harris, YMCA of the Triangle community outreach director, thanked all of the participants for making the career fair a success, and conveyed sincere gratitude to the speakers who took time out of their busy schedules to attend.

"It is good to have people like you that care about our teens and their futures," Harris said.

Teens respond positively to science careers

Clayton inspired many teens interested in, or already pursuing, STEM opportunities. One said, "I like science, but never thought about doing research in a lab. It seems exciting." Another added, "Ms. Clayton seems so smart and on point. What she does seems important. I want to do something important."

Clayton left participants with sound advice. "Never be content with living inside the box your neighborhoods and surroundings may have attempted to build around you," Clayton urged. "Step outside without fear, and you will be surprised with the rewards you will gain from that."

(Myra Westmoreland is an administrative officer in the NIEHS Administrative Management Branch.)



Clayton showed students some of the items she uses in her work as a biologist at NIEHS. (Photo courtesy of Myra Westmoreland)



No science question was out of bounds, as Clayton responded to each query in language that her audience could understand. (Photo courtesy of Myra Westmoreland)



Harris moderated the panel discussion, and said he was pleased with the variety of careers represented at the fair. (Photo courtesy of Myra Westmoreland)



Career fair mentees and mentors mingled during the three hour event. (Photo courtesy of Myra Westmoreland)

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